sacraments

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by spqr

Summary

Gale takes a deep breath, and turns to John, and says, “Bucky. I need you to get me out of here.”

There are voices out in the church—a lot of voices, all on Marge’s side of things except for the boys from the 100th who made the trek out to Wyoming for him. John’s the only one in here with Gale, and he stares for a minute before he says, “What?”

Notes

just a small thing !!

See the end of the work for more notes

Standing in the little room behind the altar Gale can never remember the name of, where the priest has told him he can get ready—not that getting ready entails much more than fixing his hair and fixing the tie on his uniform and trying not to vomit—Gale takes a deep breath, and turns to John, and says, “Bucky. I need you to get me out of here.”

There are voices out in the church—a lot of voices, all on Marge’s side of things except for the boys from the 100th who made the trek out to Wyoming for him. John’s the only one in here with Gale, and he stares for a minute before he says, “What?”

“You heard me,” Gale says. He feels like he might be dying.

“You’re getting *married,*” John hisses, like he doesn’t know. Like that isn’t the whole problem.

“No,” says Gale.

“*Yes.*”

“No.” Gale swallows. He’s actually going to vomit, in a second. “I’m not. I can’t, John.”

Bucky stares at him for another minute, expression unreadable—locked down tight. He searches Gale’s face, like he’s trying to figure out whether he’s messing with him—as if he has ever, in his life, messed with him—then something gives way inside him and abruptly he’s on Gale’s side, hand on his head, muttering *Jesus fuck,* ducking to peer out the door of the little room at the people out in the church, the crowds in their finery, all these people who are going to hate Gale for the rest of his life for leaving Marjorie Spencer at the altar—and he gets it, because he hates himself, too.

“I don’t have a car,” is what Bucky says, finally, when he ducks back in to regroup. “Your father-in-law picked me up from the train station.”

“You used to hotwire the Jeep when Kidd hid the keys,” Gale says, numbly.

Bucky swears under his breath, sneaks one last glance at the congregation, then takes out his flask, takes a quick pull, and dumps the rest all over Gale’s dress uniform.

“What the—” Gale starts, red faced.

“Can it.” Bucky puts the flask away in his lapel. “You want me to get you out of here, I’m getting you out of here. Say thank you. And play along.”

He’s right—the only way out of the little room Gale can’t remember the name of is through the rest of the church, where people want to stop them and talk to them and ask why they’re walking *away* from the altar instead of towards it—*isn’t it meant to start soon? Shouldn't you gentlemen be taking your places?*

Bucky gestures to the stain on Gale’s uniform and says over and over —even to Marge’s *mom,* and if there’s a hell Gale’s definitely going to it—that they had a little pre-wedding toast gone wrong, he needs to get Gale to the bathroom to clean him up a bit, won’t take a minute. *Can’t have him marrying your daughter smelling like a drunk, can we?* Ha ha, laughs all around—as usual, Bucky charms them fast and slippery past any sort of skepticism.

They bypass the men’s room door, bypass the bigger room where he can hear Marge and her bridesmaids giggling inside—sharp lurch of nausea, Bucky must see Gale turn green because he says *ohhhh*-kay and grabs his arm to drag him along faster; they’ve got no time to vomit—then push out a back door into the over-packed parking lot, morning sun bright and clear and Casper, Wyoming somehow looking very normal while Gale slides sideways into a melting hellscape.

Bucky spots a likely-looking convertible, drags Gale over and plants him sitting against the side, so the car blocks the view of him from the back door, in case anyone comes looking. Then he slithers into the front seat, slumped down low, and pulls wires from under the steering wheel, muttering and swearing and telling Gale—who barely hears him, a loud, pressurized ringing in his ears—that this is nothing like hotwiring the Jeep back at Thorpe Abbotts, they’re completely different cars, and at least he knew Jack Kidd was never going to call the cops on him, not that he wouldn’t go to jail for Buck—because obviously he’s going to have to when Marge’s dad and her big football-playing brothers come after him and Bucky has to kill them to defend his honor, and Gale can’t even argue that you don’t defend men’s honor, you defend women’s honor—he’s the one Marge’s male relatives are going to be defending her honor *from*—because he’s too busy shoving his head between his knees and trying to remember how to breathe. Half a dozen times he almost gets up to tell Bucky, okay, I changed my mind, we can go back in now, because resigning himself to a lifetime of feeling like a bear in a trap, watching his life happen around him instead of *to* him, can’t be anywhere as acutely horrible as

what he's feeling right now, sitting on this heated asphalt with the contents of Bucky's flask all over him, about to steal a car and ruin his life—and Marge's. But he doesn't say anything, and after a few minutes Bucky exclaims *a-ha*, and the deep throaty purr of the engine starts up against his back, like the purr of his fort—salvation—and he manages to grope around behind him until he finds the door handle, and hauls himself blindly up into the passenger seat.

"Why's it always me driving you around?" Bucky asks, squinting in the sunlight as he throws the car in reverse and backs out of the spot, his arm across the seat—across the back of Gale's shoulders. "When are you going to drive me around for a change?"

"Not today," Gale says, and puts his head between his knees again. His mouth is closed tight. He's trying to breathe through his nose, trying to ignore his lungs telling him he needs more air than that, needs to hyperventilate. "Jesus," he says, to his own feet, to the footwell of the convertible that Bucky just stole for him—Gale thinks from Marge's aunt. He squeezes his eyes shut, abruptly overwhelmed by a black wave of guilt, shame, panic, like he gulped a bunch of crude oil right out of the ground. *"Jesus,* Bucky, what did I just do?"

There's a hand on the back of his head, big, heavy, familiar, grounding. "It's alright, Buck."

"It's not." He *knows* it's not, he knows he's screwed up, but it does feel, abruptly—with Bucky's hands on him—alright. The wind whips through the open roof of the convertible. It's cold. It feels like they're up in the air, flying. It's a bench seat, in front, and Bucky's knee is right next to Gale's face. He melts over without thinking and presses his forehead to his thigh, warm and solid through the familiar fabric of his uniform pants—the same pants Gale is wearing, Army-issue, but these particular pants familiar since Gale has ironed and pressed them for him a thousand times. John's hand doesn't leave his hair, holding him down tight, and Gale takes what feels like his first productive breath since he woke up this morning, staring down the barrel of the rest of his life, John asleep in the other twin bed in Marge's brother's childhood room—sprawled out enormously under a blanket that was almost comically small, big arms and big legs starfished over the sides, his mouth open, snoring underneath his rumpled-up mustache the way Gale's heard him snore what feels like almost every night of his life—and realized that if he went through with it and married Marge he would be divorcing himself from his own soul, from the part of him that had been ripped to shreds and buried six feet under and reborn a thousand times in John's company over the course of the war, that

hurt and bled and raged—the slick red truth, the marrow of life. He could let himself be anesthetized but he would never wake up from it—he would slip away, the way men did in the infirmary, insulated from pain but also insulated from thought, from the meat of who they were. More than once he'd told John—John trying to wave him off, not wanting to hear it, not wanting to think about it, *Jesus, Buck, that's never gonna happen*—that if he was ever like that, terminal and laying in a bed waiting to die, he didn't want John to let the doctors give him any anesthesia. *If I've only got a few minutes left, I want to be alive for them*—and John looked miserable, pinched and remote, but he squeezed the nape of Gale's neck and said okay. Said, that happens, I'll sit with you. You can squeeze my hand like a lady giving birth. His first night back, Gale had a nightmare, and when Marge found him and brought him a cup of tea and he started to tell her about it, she squeezed his hands and said, *Oh, think happier thoughts.* And he did try, for her, only all his happier thoughts were of John.

"Pull over," he says abruptly, reaching without looking to yank the steering wheel.

John swears, thigh jumping under Gale's forehead as he slams on the brake pedal, and—Gale lifts his head just in time to see a Ford lay on its horn as it swerves around them—steers them narrowly out of the way of oncoming traffic.

"Now I see why I'm the one in the driver's seat, you maniac!" Bucky shouts, over the noise of gravel pinging off the bottom of the car, veering roughly onto the shoulder. The car lurches to a stop, and Bucky throws it in park, breathing heavy. Angry, like a bull. "You trying to get us both killed? Is that why we just left your wedding like Bonnie and Clyde? Trying to go out in a blaze of glory? And you're *definitely* Bonnie, by the way—"

"Shut up for a minute," Gale says.

"Yeah, yeah, screw you too," Bucky says sourly, but indulgent, like he's used to Gale's impenetrable antics—which is preposterous. If anyone's used to anyone's antics, it's Gale who's used to John's. Bucky takes a crumpled pack of Lucky Strikes out of his lapel pocket and taps one out, still making faces to himself, twitching his head back and forth a little bit like he's carrying on the conversation with Gale in his head, and they're sitting close on the bench seat and suddenly Gale has to get out of the car, so he does.

"Where do you think you're going?" John calls after him, but Gale

ignores him.

There isn't anywhere *to* go—they're up on the road north of Casper, two lanes that carve through the hills all the way to the state line, and nothing but houses and horse farms between here and there. Down the bottom of the hill Gale can see the town, little rooftops like jewels, little cars moving in the street, small and perfect and silent from far away, almost like it is looking down at the earth while he's flying. He's vaguely surprised to realize how far out they are, how long they drove like that, with Gale's head down in John's lap, Gale just focusing on breathing—and what must *that* have looked like to anyone driving past, Gale wonders, sick; Jesus, it's a wonder no one called the cops on them. He could've ruined John's life, just like that, for nothing. He drags a hand over his face and goes to stand on the edge of the shoulder, where gravel slopes away into grass, and smells cigarette smoke behind him, yellow and warm and grimy. John's humming to himself a little, and Gale's not as panicked anymore as he should be. Right about now they'll be realizing the groom isn't anywhere in the church, and neither is the best man, and they might be out in the parking lot, looking for them. Gale can see the steeple from here but he can't see any more detail than that; like a bombardier through a bomb sight. He supposes he did about as much damage as a bomb would've done. It's strange: over there, whenever he thought about home, about Marge and about their lives together, while he was getting shot up and barely sleeping and then while he was in the camp, starving and trying to keep his boys alive by his bloody fingernails, he mostly pictured it in his head like this: perfect and far away, suspended in time, waiting for him. He figures in a sense getting sent home was a lot like getting shot down. Plunged down violently into a landscape he was used to seeing from far away.

"What are we doin', Buck?" John calls over to him—ever impatient. Gale figures he's still worried about the cops being called, Marge's aunt pressing charges, doing time for grand theft auto.

"Give me a minute," Gale calls back. "I'm thinking."

"Thinking about what?"

"About why I just did that," Gale says.

Bucky hums. Gale's not facing him, but he knows what he looks like anyways, pinching the cigarette out from between his lips, arm over the empty seat next to him, playing it cool but getting antsy underneath. "Can you think about that in the car?" he says. "While I

drive us the hell out of dodge, maybe? So we don't get *shot* like Bonnie and Clyde?"

"Oh, *now* you care about getting shot," Gale shoots back, meanly.

Bucky makes a noise like he's being impossible, and goes back to impatient silence.

Gale gnaws on his train of thought for a minute like a tough piece of gum, grinds it between his molars. He thinks—never once in his life, in all his years of knowing her, has he ever yelled at Marge. Never even snapped at her. He's always thought it made him a good man, being so gentle with her all the time, treating her like porcelain, but now he remembers all the times she ever asked him to grab her harder, be rough with her, like rough would be exciting if he could just bring himself to do it, and thinks maybe it was a sort of distrust, thinking she couldn't take it, that she wouldn't put him back in line if he got out of it, that she wouldn't know how. Maybe he never raised his voice at her because he knew she wouldn't shout back, or maybe he never raised his voice at her because he never got angry enough, never cared enough to do it—no point in yelling like the ship was going down while they were just floating on a lazy river. There were a few weeks there, back in the stalag, when he thought he was coming down with something, his throat was so rough from all the yelling he was doing, just at John—who was being petulant and reckless and scaring Gale half to death. It had felt urgent and important that John know every little thing he was doing that Gale disapproved of, that he stop doing those things and agree with him, that they go back to thinking with one singular mind.

Old married couple, the boys had called them more than once, complaining about the icy atmosphere in the combine. *Like a goddamn radio comedy. Mr. and Mrs. Stalag Luft III. Performed every weeknight and twice on Sundays.*

"Done thinking yet, Major Cleven?" John calls from the car.

"No," Gale snaps, short.

"At this rate," John says, "we'll be pushing up daisies before you make up your mind."

Gale ignores him, so he can think about him some more.

It's almost silent up here, nothing but the distant whoosh of cars on far-off roads, the wind rustling in the pine trees, John blowing out

cigarette smoke, his stuffy nose whistling quietly. Gale grinds the heel of his spit-shined dress shoe into the gravel just to hear something, the crunch like bone. He thinks the problem might be that he'd rather spend the rest of his life in a barbed-wire prison camp with Bucky than he would in a big perfect house with Marge, even if that meant the rest of his life was only a few days, a few hours, a few minutes. He's not sure what he should do about that, but he figures maybe Bucky will know. Usually when one of them doesn't know what the hell is going on, the other one does.

"Bucky," he says.

"M-hm," says John, pretending not to be interested because he's irritated—a tone of voice Gale knows well.

"I think I did it because of you," Gale says. "What do you figure that means?"

Bucky's silent.

Gale turns around to look, squinting in the sun, hand cupped like an awning over his eyes. Bucky's staring at him over the boot of the car, twisted around in the driver's seat, holding himself very still like there's about to be a fight. Gale wonders if there's about to be a fight. He swallows, never looking away from Bucky's eyes, which are dark and very intense, and repeats, "I think I couldn't go through with marrying Marge because of you. That seems a little abnormal, doesn't it?"

"Gale," says John, in a strange voice. He sounds like he got hit hard, in the throat.

And then, from the bottom of the hill, the sirens start.

"Marge's aunt," Gale says, stomach sinking, "that woman always hated me," and Bucky's grousing, irate, *God fucking damn it, Buck, the things I do for you*—starting the car again, loud sudden roar of the engine, tossing his lit cigarette down on the asphalt, Gale leaping back into the passenger seat as John peels out, burning rubber, speeding up into the hills.

John drives like a maniac, like a bat out of hell, speedometer pushing a hundred as he glides around the long, looping corners of the hill road, air slipping over the sleek body of the car, slamming hard past Gale's ears until he can't really hear the sirens behind them at all—the cops too far back to catch them up. After a while John slows, turns

them onto a dirt road for a few hundred meters and then off into the trees, juddering over rough raw ground, not anywhere a convertible like this should be driven and yet John does it anyways, and Gale doesn't say anything. The pine branches get lower, closer together; they have to duck. And then there's a thick wall of green in front of them and John has to stop—an abrupt stomp on the brake, the car jolting. John puts it in park and reaches under the steering wheel, his back to Gale, to untwist the wires he used to start it. The engine goes quiet, cooling down, pinging under the hood. John sits back up. He looks at Gale, windswept and pink-cheeked, something halfway between anger and resolve hardening on his face.

"Bucky," Gale says, wary, half a question.

"Hold on a minute," Bucky says, sounding sick but determined, like he does when he's afraid but trying to hide it. "I've got a theory. Hear me out."

Gale's heart is going like a racehorse inside his chest, but he waits. Bucky slides a hand up the back of his neck, holding the scruff, the same place he always squeezes, only this time he uses it to drag Gale in, closer to him. Gale tenses, reflexively, but Bucky doesn't let up—thumb tucked up behind Gale's ear, tugging him in gently but firmly. "Let me try something," he says, his eyes intent on Gale's mouth, and there's no one here but them and the trees, so Gale makes himself untense, makes himself relax one muscle at a time under the palm of John's hand. John draws him in again, and he goes, until their faces are too close to see, until he can taste John's humid breath on his mouth and feel his nose nuzzled carefully against the side of his own, like he's waiting to see if Gale pulls away.

Gale sucks in a breath, and holds it.

John kisses him—only once, with his mouth closed. His mustache tickles against Gale's upper lip, but it's soft, not bristly. Not something that Gale would mind feeling again—maybe feeling all over him.

He wants to sink forward, ask without words for another, for more, but instead he makes himself pull back. John doesn't let him go far, hand tight on the back of his neck. They're too close for Gale to see his face, but he can hear that he's taking very even, controlled breaths through his nose, like it's a herculean effort to hold himself like this—to hold himself *back,* Gale thinks, and heat presses the breath out of his own chest. "John," he hears himself say, like someone else is talking, "don't do this just because I want it."

John makes a broken noise, and kisses him again—short, hard, saying when he draws away, “Stupid. You’re so stupid, Buck, Jesus—”

“*Hey,*” Gale says, trying to rear back, offended.

John doesn’t let him. He drags him in again, for real this time, drags him in so greedily that they’re practically sitting in each other’s laps in the bench seat, shoved up close. Gale gets a hand on his chest—that *chest,* Christ—and forces him back, enough that he can give him a stern look. “You just stole a car ’cause I asked you to,” he points out. “It’s not outside of the realm of possibility.”

“C’mere,” John says, staring at his mouth but not actually hearing anything that’s coming out of it. He tries to kiss him again, but Gale dodges, glaring.

“I’m serious, John,” he insists, because it’s important to him John actually stops to think about this, weighs the pros and the cons, doesn’t just jump because Gale did first. “This could ruin your life, we ever get caught.”

“Gale,” says John, indulgent but getting a little impatient, an edge of anger in his voice, “my life was going to be over the second you said *I do* to someone who wasn’t me.”

Gale stares. He’s stunned, shocked to silence. John smiles, fond, and tucks his thumb into the meat of Gale’s cheek, handling his head. “Two greatest moments of my life,” John tells him, “when I saw you alive through that fence, and when you asked me to spring you from your own damn wedding." His smile blows wide, blinding. "Jesus, I feel just like I did when they liberated us,” and Gale can’t take it anymore, him talking like that, he can’t, so he presses him flat against the seat and wrestles over his big body to kiss him some more, furiously and intently, elbows and knees wedged uncomfortably against the car. They're too big to be necking in the front seat like teenagers, but John makes happy, hungry noises underneath him, and Gale figures, if this is the closest either of them ever get to a wedding —well, at least they’re wearing the right clothes, even if his dress uniform does smell like John's whiskey.

“John,” he murmurs, feeling drugged, or drunk, upper lip tingling from John’s mustache and his whole body bright and alive with the feeling of John’s underneath him, but fighting through the undertow, because he has to make him understand something important. He pushes up on his elbows, far enough to look at his face: young, kissed

open, almost sleepy, smiling so sweetly up at Gale—and says, “John Egan, I do.”

John looks confused for a second, but then he understands him, and his face gets serious. He takes his hands back from where they’ve been wandering and puts them on Gale’s face, and tells him steadily, “I do too, Gale. Every goddamn day for the rest of your life, I do,” and it won’t ever mean anything to anyone except them, but that’s alright. If Gale could only ever mean something to one damn person in the world, it would be Bucky. They don't need to say, *in sickness and in health, till death do us part*; they’ve already lived those vows, anyways.

End Notes

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